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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 001006

SIPDIS  
C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (DECLAS DATE ADDED, CLASS BY ADDED)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/23/15  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)  
SUBJECT: POLICE DISRUPT U.S. DIPLOMAT'S MEETING WITH  
NGOs

MINSK 00001006 001.4 OF 002

Classified by Charge Constance Phlipot, reason 1.4(g)

11. (C) Summary: Gomel Police officers disrupted a meeting between NGOs and two Emboffs on August 24 and prevented the latter from leaving for 40 minutes. Poloff presented his dipcard to police officers and was held until two more police and an immigration officer arrived. The immigration officer scrutinized Poloff's dipcard and diplomatic passport and continued to hold Emboffs until the local government-controlled media arrived, which filmed Emboffs as they left. The police left immediately following the Emboffs and did not detain or question the NGO representatives. According to an independent journalist, the police had received orders to follow the "foreigners." Emboffs cancelled all planned meetings and immediately returned to Minsk. End Summary.

12. (C) Poloff and LES political assistant arrived in Gomel on August 23 for a two-day visit to meet with local NGOs, independent journalists, political parties, and Chernobyl rehabilitation programs. The trip was planned three weeks in advance with correspondence between the Ministry of Health and MFA to secure meetings with Gomselmash and the new radiation center hospital. As Emboffs left a meeting with representatives of Belarus' largest combine producer Gomselmash, a local reporter and cameraman were outside videotaping and asked for a few words about Emboffs' visit to Gomel. Emboffs asked them to stop filming and left for their next meeting.

13. (C) Emboffs were to meet leader of the civil initiative "Fund for Promoting Local Development" Victor Korniyenko and other NGO representatives at his home and office at Poleskaya St. During the meeting with Gomselmash, Korniyenko called to inform that the police cordoned off both ends of Poleskaya St. due to an alleged bomb threat in Korniyenko's neighborhood. No through traffic was allowed and the meeting would have to take place at another location.

14. (C) At 14:15, Emboffs arrived at the new location for the meeting, 35 Lenin St. Upon arrival, Poloff noticed probable KGB officers standing in the courtyard next to darkly tinted cars with multiple antennas. The meeting took place in a vacant apartment on the second floor. Those present included Korniyenko, representative from the Gomel Regional Center for Social Assistance Elena Dedkova, 'Gart' youth group activist Yulia Sivet,

'Limon' youth group activist Sergey Semenov, civil initiative representative Vladimir Katsora, and 'Yarovit' cultural and educational center director Yevginy Kostsyushko. Five minutes into the discussion, a "plumber" arrived to fix a "problem" in the apartment. [Note: This is the KGB's most common method to disrupt a meeting.] The owner of the apartment refused to let him in. Five minutes later, two police officers entered the apartment on the grounds that a neighbor had reported an illegal gathering and demanded everyone's identification.

15. (C) Poloff presented his dipcard, but the police would not allow Emboffs to leave. The LES' documents were in the car and she was not allowed to get them. Poloff repeatedly told the officers they had no right to keep them from leaving, but the officers continued to block the door and would not even look at Emboffs directly when speaking. They asked ridiculous and sometimes irrelevant questions, such as "How long have you been in Belarus?", "Where do you live?", and "What is your nationality?" Poloff continued to keep the Embassy informed of the situation via mobile phone and took the officers' names and identification numbers. Eventually, the commanding officer went outside to call his superiors. When Poloff attempted to follow, the remaining officer shut the door, preventing him from leaving. The commanding officer returned and said to wait another five minutes until his "colleagues" arrived.

16. (C) Twenty minutes after the police entered the apartment, two more police officers (this time a major) and a representative from the immigration department arrived. Poloff again told the police they had no right to detain the Emboffs. The major looked over Poloff's dipcard and damaged it by pulling the inner document out of its lamination. He then passed it to the immigration

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officer, claiming it was not a real document and that it was unclear what embassy Poloff represented. The immigration officer repeated the same actions as the major, so Poloff presented his diplomatic passport. The immigration officer briefly looked over the biographical information and then scrutinized Poloff's visas and entry-exit stamps. The officers were not interested in the other participants' documents. Emboffs were still not allowed to leave.

17. (C) An independent journalist who Emboffs were to meet at a later time witnessed the commotion from outside. He called LES and informed her that the local government-controlled media had arrived and were preparing to enter the building. Emboffs immediately moved to the kitchen to avoid the possibility of being photographed. Fifteen minutes after the immigration officer arrived, Korniyenko suggested Emboffs try to leave again. Poloff approached the immigration officer and asked to leave. Her response: "Of course. No one has been holding you here." The same reporter and cameraman seen earlier at Gomselmash were standing in the stairwell and videotaped Emboffs leaving and then rushed outside to videotape the Embassy vehicle. Emboffs had been held for 40 minutes.

18. (C) Not long after the incident, Korniyenko called and said that the police left immediately after Emboffs without questioning or apprehending the NGO and youth representatives. He also reported that the KGB had broken into his house on Poleskaya St. and searched his documents. The journalist who had called Emboffs earlier reportedly asked a police officer how the reporters and police knew about the new location for the

meeting. The officer replied that they had received orders to follow the foreigners (Emboffs) around town. Emboffs tried to leave town via a road that led past the original meeting place at Poleskaya St, but a traffic police officer stopped the vehicle and said the street was closed to through traffic; however, he was allowing all public transportation to pass. Emboffs were forced to travel back through downtown Gomel to access another exit road to Minsk. They cancelled all further meetings.

19. (C) Comment: The police hinted that Emboffs' detainment was due to LES' failure to have her passport on her person, but it was obvious the true reason was to harass Emboffs, photograph them, and disrupt their meeting. Local state-controlled media frequently stakes out Emboffs' visits to the region. However, this is the first time in recent years that the authorities have used such forceful means to stage a photo-op and interfere in a meeting. Charge spoke with the head of the Americas' desk at the MFA immediately after the Emboffs' release and expressed concern for the mistreatment of a diplomat and documents. Post will follow up with a diplomatic note protesting the incident.

PHLIPOT